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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001263

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: MILITARY BREAKS SILENCE ON KURDISH OPENING

REF: A. ANKARA 1158 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. ANKARA 1214

Classified By: Pol-Mil Counselor Anthony Godfrey, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment: Turkish Military Chief GEN Basbug used his August 25 Victory Week commemoration message to break the military's silence on the government's "Democratic Opening" on Kurdish issues (ref a). His message gave support to the government's effort to take steps in the "economic, social-cultural and international field" in conjunction with military efforts to defeat the PKK while reaffirming the military's support for Turkey's unitary state structure and ruling out the military dealing with the PKK directly. Political parties were quick to embrace Basbug's message as affirmation of each of their various positions on the "Democratic Opening." The ruling AKP called Basbug's message a warning to the opposition parties. The Nationalist Action Party (MHP), the fiercest critic of the government initiative (ref b), said Basbug's statement made clear that the military did not endorse the government's initiative and that "the opening has ended." Comment: The National Security Council statement and Basbug's message are important indicators that the TGS, while maintaining well-known red lines, continues to back the government's initiative despite vocal objections to the initiative by the opposition and despite its strained relations with the government. The message reflects Basbug's conviction that non-military measures are critical to defeating the PKK and could help allay fears among nationalists that the government's initiative would lead to the break-up of Turkey. End summary and comment.

Military Reiterates Red Lines...

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Chief of the Turkish General Staff (TGS) GEN Basbug used a message commemorating the 87th anniversary of "Victory Week" (which marked the Turkish military's successful campaign in 1922 to drive out Greek forces from Western Anatolia that effectively marked the beginning of the Republic of Turkey) to break the military's silence on the government's Kurdish initiative. Basbug's message reiterated the military's well-known positions regarding its support for the secular, unitary nature of the Republic of Turkey and highlighted Article III of the Constitution, which states that "The State, Country, and Nation of Turkey is an indivisible whole. The language of the Republic is Turkish." The commemoration message encapsulated TGS's position on the Democratic Opening with the following points:

-- The unitary state structure must not be harmed: The statement stressed that the Turkish Armed Forces will remain a party in defense of the Turkish nation-state and would never accept moves that could undermine the structure of the nation state and the unitary state;

-- Opposition to the politicization of cultural identity. While noting its respect for cultural differences, the military opposes the politicization of these differences for political gain. The statement noted that this was not possible within the framework of the Turkish constitution.

-- No dealing with terrorist groups: The statement stressed that the Turkish military would never participate in any activities that could pave the way for dealing with a terrorist organization or its supporters.

-- Denunciation of terrorism: In a veiled reference to the predominantly-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), the statement declares that the military will "not accept tolerance for terror shown by those who benefit from democracy."

-- Limits to Freedom of Speech: In a likely warning to all parties to tone down the irresponsible rhetoric in the debate over the government's initiative, the statement notes that the freedom of speech must be respected, but should not be allowed to jeopardize the existence of the state, polarize the country or to fuel tensions.

... And Support for Opening

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13. (SBU) Importantly, the message also noted that even as the military continues its operations against the PKK, it believes that the state must also undertake measures in the "economic, socio-cultural and international realm." This statement reflects Basbug's conviction that the ultimate solution to the PKK challenge is through non-military means.

Parties Seize on Basbug's Message

14. (C) The political parties were quick to seize on Basbug's message as affirmation of their various views on the government's Kurdish initiative. AKP representatives interpreted the statement as an expression of support for the government's efforts and a warning to the opposition that has been fiercely critical of the democratic opening. Opposition Nationalist Action Party (MHP) called Basbug's statement a response to the government's Kurdish opening project and said that the opening has now been closed as the statement showed that the opening was not a state initiative and that claims of the military's support to the effort in the August 20 National Security Council statement was a lie. CHP in turn said the statement rejected the August 20 National Security Council's (MGK) declaration and refuted claims that the military and the government shared the same view regarding the "democratic opening." The pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) said Basbug's statement showed that the government's opening did not deviate from state policy and only contained cosmetic changes for dealing with the Kurdish question.

Comment

15. (C) Basbug's message came at a time when the AKP was politically vulnerable from the oppositions' attacks against its signal initiative to resolve the Kurdish question. Had the military placed greater emphasis on damaging the AKP, it could have crafted its message in a way that would have doomed the nascent government initiative. Instead, by voicing his support (albeit caveated by the usual red lines),

Basbug's statement will likely help the government sustain momentum in its efforts and allay fears among nationalists that the Kurdish initiative will lead to the dissolution of the Turkish state.

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